

# The Next Stop

**Fresno's old Santa Fe train depot due for a \$6m makeover.**

By Russell Clemings  
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The old Santa Fe train depot, a downtown Fresno landmark since the end of the 19th century, is about to get a \$6 million makeover to restore its California mission-style look and its transportation center function.

Over the next year, workers will remove extraneous additions, repair roofs and walls, excavate remnants of the original interior, and convert the structure into a 5,400-square-foot Amtrak station and 21,100 square feet of rental space for offices, restaurants and other uses.

"We're trying to work back in as many of the elements as we possibly can and still maintain good security and access for Amtrak," said the project's chief architect, Christopher Johnson.

Initially erected in 1899 for the San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley railroad, the depot underwent seven additions between 1908 and 1985, when a bridge was built to connect the depot to the adjacent freight office.

The freight office, which serves as Amtrak's current Fresno station, is not part of the planned renovation. But the rest of the complex is scheduled for a dramatic makeover that will replace pavement with plazas, double the site's parking to 127 spaces, and coat the entire building with gleaming white stucco and a red tile roof.

Among the additions to be removed are a two-story building, a former dispatch center, which sidles up to Santa Fe Street and blocks most views of the depot's original entrance. Also doomed is a small portion of the depot's second floor that lies just to the north of the entrance.

When the work is finished, the view from the corner of Tulare and Santa Fe streets will be transformed. A parking lot's asphalt will be replaced by a plaza for pedestrians. Behind it, the depot's original entrance will be restored at the base of a three-story clock tower that is now mostly obscured by the later additions.

"Effectively, it opens the building up, so you can see the view," said Thomas Pyle, another of the project's architects.

Amtrak users will pass through the restored entrance and walk into a waiting room that will look much as it did when the depot opened -- a plaster ceiling and walls with wooden wainscot around the base and a picture molding near the top. Twin fireplaces will stand at opposite ends of the room, water fountains will occupy niches on the perimeter, and representations of the original doors will be hung in their frames.

Outside, atop the tower, the design includes a wrought iron clock measuring 11 feet in diameter -- the depot's original, if it can be located; a reproduction if not.

"We actually have all of the original drawings for it," Johnson said, "so we can re-create it. But we have heard that the original clock face is still around. It was in the [Fresno] Chamber of Commerce building for a while, but then they remodeled, and somehow it left. It's still around town, hopefully."

Plans for the rest of the depot's space remain sketchy. Across the street at City Hall, assistant public works manager Robb Wood says the second floor probably will be leased as offices. A space on the first floor abutting Tulare Street may become a restaurant.

"We're talking to several different possibilities, but we're keeping our options open at this time," Wood said.

Eventually, if a long-planned consolidation of the city's two major rail lines comes to pass, Amtrak service may move from the depot to a new site on the Union Pacific tracks a half-mile away. If that happens, the entire depot may be converted to offices.

But city officials say such a move is at least a decade away.

"We're going to have a minimum of 10 years, and more like 15 to 20, before they can consolidate," Wood said. "So it's going to have a long life" as an Amtrak station.

In recent years, with Amtrak consigned to the adjacent freight office, the depot has served as a local office for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad, successor to the San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley.

Last month, the city took possession of the depot and adjacent vacant land for slightly more than \$1 million, a sum that included \$225,000 to offset the railroad's costs of moving to new offices in Calwa. About one-third of the purchase price came from the city's parking fund and the rest from state grants.

The \$6 million restoration budget includes a \$4.9 million state appropriation and additional funds from the state's Office of Historic Preservation, the California Pollution Control Financing Authority and Amtrak.

The current schedule calls for the project to go out to bid in September or October, and for construction to be completed in fall 2004, Wood said.

Passenger service will not be affected by the renovation.

The reporter can be reached at [rcllemings@fresnobee.com](mailto:rcllemings@fresnobee.com) or 441-6371.